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AUTHOR Conger, George P.
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ABSTRACT

The college board of trustees assumes a number of major obligations, including establishing institutional policy. A policy is an expression of beliefs or judgements derived from an assessment of a set of values adopted by the board as a guide to present and future action. As beliefs, judgements and issues change, policies must also change to remain relevant and legitimate. This does not mean that only new policies are relevant; but old policies need to be reviewed periodically and revised to meet current situations and to conform to current convictions of the board. Policy manuals play a role in creating and maintaining functional policies. To be usable, college policies should be bound together in a logically organized, properly indexed, and readable document. Several topics are common to policy manuals at most community/junior colleges, including policies related to legal provisions, the board, the president, the chairman of the board, the college's organization, and the college staff, students, programs, and business management. Though there are many commonalities, policies are relevant only if they are beneficial to a particular institution; many policies though relevant in one setting have no significance in another. Policies should establish boundaries for action and provide reasonable flexibility for the president in implementing them. In establishing policy, board members should use the resources offered by the college president, staff, and students, interested citizens, and professional associations. (Author/KL)

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CREATING RELEVANT POLICIES

George P. Conger
President
Aims Community College
Greeley, Colorado

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
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CREATING RELEVANT POLICIES

by

Dr. George R. Conger, President

Aims Community College

Greeley, Colorado

The corporate identity of a community junior college resides with that body of elected or appointed laymen known as the college's policy makers. They function from place to place under a variety of titles: The College Committee, The Board of Trustees, The Regents, The Board of Control, The Board of Trust, The Governing Board and The Board of Directors. For our purposes here we will refer to them simply as the Board.

Many Board members with whom I have talked believe that the concept of a lay Board for our colleges is modeled after our American big-business corporate system. As a matter of fact, our system of collegiate governance employing lay Boards actually evolved from problems that developed in the 1300s in Italy when colleges were controlled exclusively by students. Things had gotten so out of hand that the intimidated professors asked the civil authorities to take control of the unruly situation, and they did. They subsequently created a separate board as a means of control and that pattern eventually migrated to the United States via Holland, Switzerland and Scotland.[1] The idea of a lay Board to control the affairs of American colleges was, therefore, well established some time before American business corporations and their Boards of Directors appeared on the scene.

The twentieth-century American college Board assumes either by statute or by its own bylaws a number of major obligations; establishing institutional

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[1] W. H. Crowley, "Myths and Half-Truths Distort View of Trustees," College and University Business, August, 1969.

policy is one. The term itself has come to connote authority that is seldom questioned. With the answer, "That's Policy," many troublesome questions are resolved. It's policy and that's that.

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (Second Edition, 1972) indicates that the word, policy, has its roots in the ancient language of the Greeks; specifically, the term has evolved from the Greek word, politera, which interestingly enough is also the basis for another currently familiar word: police. Policies are, therefore, the enforceable rules by which colleges function.

Colleges have existed in this country since 1636 when Harvard was founded. Currently over 3,500 public and private post-high-school educational and training institutions are functioning in America and there is every reason to believe that the majority of them will continue their operations well into and beyond the twenty-first centruy. The boards of these colleges, of course, have and will continue to exist as their central legal authorities. The membership of these Boards, however, change with the passage of time. Some members lose elections. Others lose favor with the appointing authority. A few resign. Others die. Whatever the impetus for termination, the personality of the Board changes as new members replace veterans. And members of today's Board may not see issues in the same light as did those who comprised yesterday's committee. Yet it is today's Board that is responsible for the affairs of the college today. Yesterday's solutions may not be applicable to tommorrow's dilema.

If this logic holds true for attitudes and practices, it must also have legitimacy insofar as college policy is concerned. If Harvard's seventeenth-century policies concerning the restrictive nature of its curriculum and its modest standards for admission had not changed with the times and the convictions of its alterative Board, the Harvard you and I know would not exist.

Policies, like people and programs, need to be evaluated periodically to determine their relevance and effectiveness. So, in one sense, the most practical way of creating relevant policies is to revise old ones so that they are responsive to present conditions and conform to current convictions held by a majority of the members of the Board. This is a maintenance function and too often it is neglected because it is not a chore that is either exciting or entertaining but it is quite necessary.

Colleges are usually very good about keeping their policies in a manual of some sort. Some of us take pride in the appearance and usefulness of this document, the Policy Manual, but if the truth were known, most of us have put them together simply because accrediting agencies require them. They are in all probability read more frequently and thoroughly by accreditation visitation teams than they are by our staff or the Board. That's unfortunate but understandable.

Most policy manuals are confusing. Few let the reader know where to locate a particular policy on a specific topic. Fewer are interesting to read. They look like collections of old legal opinions. The language is awkward and generally archaic. For some reason we tend to believe such things appear more official if the average reader has difficulty comprehending their meaning.

A college may create the most relevant policies in the world but if they cannot be quickly retrieved when needed or understood when read, they lose quite a bit of their relevance. Therefore, the policy manual itself has a role to play in this matter of creating or maintaining functional policies. The effective manual is logically organized, properly indexed and it is readable. If it has an attractive binder or cover and if it is easy to add a page here and there when necessary, then the manual is even better. But if it's not

usable, it's useless.

Too many laymen who serve on college Boards shy away from certain kinds of policy matters. Most understand the world of finance so they are not reluctant to speak up on fiscal matters; however, in more philosophical areas such as General Education Requirements or Nonpunative Grading Practices they tend to withdraw. This is a natural reaction when being confronted with the unfamiliar. However, to be a Board member a person has to have special talents and strengths or else he would not have been elected or appointed to the post. These qualities give the Board member keener insights whether he realizes it or not. These traits permit the Board member to see farther along the path, to feel things others ignor and to hear commen s other ears miss. From time to time he may propose a course of action that seems peculiar, impetuous or down right dangerous to his colleagues or the college president. But if such a proposal evolves from the Board member's personal observations and convictions and if it is seasoned with sound judgment and reasonableness, then he should pursue it. To capitulate to less informed or less inspired associates betrays the trust of those who put him on the Board and it detracts from the Board's total ability to create relevant policies. In the final analysis, it is the Board which defines the term: relevant.

A review of community junior college policy manuals would turn up a number of common topics. My personal limited though careful study supports this. I have found that any community junior college policy manual one looks at is likely to contain statements concerning the following:

LEGAL PROVISIONS

- Source of Authority

THE BOARD

- Membership

  Method of Selection
  Term of Office
  Compensation
  Quorum
  Officers
  Organization

- Duties

- Powers

THE PRESIDENT

- Method of Selection

- Relationship to Board

- Duties and Authority

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

- Relationship to President

- Relationship to Other Board Members

- Distinctive Powers

COLLEGE TABLE OF ORGANIZATION

THE COLLEGE STAFF

- Appointment/Termination

- Salary Schedules

- Participation Re: Policy

- Settling Disputes

- Leaves/Benefits

- Tenure

- Reduction in Force

- Academic Freedom
- Collective Bargaining
- Outside Employment
- Patents/Copyrights
- Political Activity
- Nepotism
- Affirmative Action
- Evaluation

STUDENTS

- Admissions
- Fees/Tuition
- Participation Re: Policy
- Due Process
- Disruptive Behavior
- Organizations
- Athletics
- Waivers
- Equal Access
- Grading

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

- Purposes
- Functions
- Organization

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

- Budget

- Audit
- Purchasing/Contracts
- Insurance
- Parking
- Gifts
- Use of Facilities
- Construction/Maintenance
- Solicitations

Policy statements which relate to the topics in my outline are obviously relevant or they would not be so universally accepted. There are, however, situations and conditions which exist in one community or on a specific campus that are foreign most everywhere else. Some may influence policy. An example or two may illustrate this point.

In the state of New York the Sullivan Act prohibits the ownership of hand guns by the general public. In Colorado there is no similar legal restriction concerning one's right to own a gun and, at times, it seems as though everyone has at least one. One Colorado junior college, Trinidad, in fact, has one of the nation's finest training programs in gunsmithing. One can readily see that the issue of hand guns on campus may be no problem at all at Cayuga County Community College in Auburn, New York, but that it might be a bothersome matter at Colorado Northwestern Community College in rural, remote Rangely. And at Trinidad State Junior College which is also a rural and remote community, one can understand that if it were to have a similar concern like the hypothetical one cited at Rangely, the Trinidad Board would have to deal with it differently. The Rangely Board may be able to draft a policy statement which would totally

prohibit guns of any type on campus. The Trinidad policy statement would have to address the general problem yet not inhibit the operations of its gunsmith program.

Florida Keys Community College in Key West, Florida, is situated on the edge of an island facing the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Less than fifty yards from their Student Center stands a modest boat dock which can accommodate a handful of small vessels. Because a large number of students and staff own their own water crafts, the dock as well as the seawalls and beaches which surround that beautiful campus would be cluttered with skiffs, dinghys and dorys if rules did not exist to regulate this possible abuse. If the Board of that college felt the circumstances required a policy pronouncement concerning water craft, its members would be addressing an issue that would be totally irrelevant to their counterparts who set policy at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona. Yet Pima may be facing an equally troublesome problem with saddle horses on its grounds. A policy concerning boats in Key West or horses in Tucson is relevant in an exclusive fashion for each college in its distinctive location. Yet the boat policy would be as irrelevant for Pima as the horse policy would be for Florida Keys.

One Board's relevant policy, therefore, may have no application whatsoever to another Board's situation. Relevancy is relative. Relevance relates to matters under consideration; things that are pertinent; issues that are immediate and appropriate.

Miami-Dade Community College's New World Campus is located in downtown Miami, Florida. Parking spaces are scarce. A policy relating to parking is relevant in Miami. Central Wyoming College in Riverton does not have the urban crowds with which to deal nor does it struggle with a sparseness

of space; therefore, parking problems are not nearly so pertinent. The College of Eastern Utah in Price has a restricted number of financial institutions with which to deal so a policy statement concerning college banking practices may not be a burning issue of urgency but for the Los Angeles Community College District in California where scores of banks within a ten-mile radius are vigorously competing for business and demanding fair consideration from public agencies, it may be a matter of immediacy.

Relevance has something to do with significance, too. Every problem does not warrant a statement of policy. Boards need to permit enough latitude in the operations of their institutions for the exercise of administrative judgement. Some things are better left in the hands of managers than on pages of manuals. Policies that prescribe parameters within which presidents and deans are free to roam are generally relevant whereas rigid, inflexible pronouncements usually are not. Leave policies should, for example, authorize out-of-state travel for the professional staff to attend professional conferences. That's relevent. Leave policies should, however, avoid listing names of specific conferences. Those that do tend to be outdated quite soon and, consequently, become irrelevant. No Board wants to spend time at each meeting revising its policies or hearing reasons why the president has made exceptions to them. If they are relevant, all of that is unnecessary.

SUMMARY

Creating relevant policies for community junior colleges does not necessarily mean that only new policies are relevant. Old policies need to be periodically reviewed and, when appropriate, revised to meet current situations. In this way all old policies remain relevant. Quite often old boots with new soles are more comfortable than a pair of brand new shoes. With a new coat of

polish, they may even look better.

Just because some other college has a statement of policy concerning something or other doesn't necessarily mean your college should, too. Policies are relevant only if they are beneficial to your particular institution. Period.

Every rule or regulation does not have to be in the form of a policy. Policies should establish boundaries within which the professional staff and students are free to range and they should be general enough to allow for reasonable elbow room. The burden for assuring sanity, equity and functionality should rest on the shoulders of the college president. The Board should give its president the same opportunities that good presidents give their subordinates: freedom to act, to lead, to take risks and to embrace error without going through the useless contortions of a pseudo-democratic charade. Give him a chance to succeed or fail. And give him sufficient flexibility and freedom to lead but, of course, not despotically. Hold him accountable and if over a reasonable period of time he does not succeed, throw the rascal out.[2]

To remain fresh and usable, college policies should be bound together in a logically organized and readable document. Relevance implies a dimension of timeliness and accessibility which can be enhanced by an institution's policy manual.

In conclusion, we all need to remember that "A policy is an expression of beliefs or judgement derived from an assessment of a set of values adopted by the board as a guide to present and future action."[3] Creating and maintaining

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[2]Warren Bennis, The Leaning Ivory Tower (Jossey-Bass Publisher, 1973), p. 83 (paraphrased).

[3]Advisor, ACCT, Washington, D.C., December 1977.

relevant policies may very well be the Board's second most important responsibility.[4] Members of the Board fortunately have a good number of resources to draw upon to assist them by way of direct input from the college president, impressions from the staff, students and interested citizens, as well as their reading materials, their associations such as ACCT and their own intuition. Keeping abreast requires an investment of time and energy but the dividends are well worth it to you, the college, and the individuals both of you serve.

POSTSCRIPT

For you who may feel that this presentation has been a bit parochial, you are invited to the rump session to follow. Our text will be the final report of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education: Three Thousand Futures, The Next Twenty Years for Higher Education.

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[4] The first, of course, is the careful selection of a president as well as the development and maintenance of a healthy working relationship with the college president.

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